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# Z\*NET ATARI ONLINE MAGAZINE

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Issue #546

SPECIAL COMDEX COVERAGE

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## EDITORS DESK

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by Ron Kovacs

There are a few things to update you on..... The release date effective with this issue is Saturday. Make a note of this change since we will NOT be found in the regular Friday evening listing. This change take place for a number of reasons which I am sure everyone will understand.

Due to a change at my regular place of REAL employment, I cannot make time available and release an issue that is edited properly. The holidays are quickly arriving and the placement of these dates plays havoc with my current schedule. And last, I am going to be traveling during the next few weeks and will not be available to produce the issues on Friday, John Nagy is going to be making an attempt to fill the void and we have time zone differences.

This change will stay in effect until at least January when we will take another look at the release time.

## ATARI IN USA TODAY

Dr. Paul Keith informed me yesterday that Atari was covered in great detail in Friday's USA Today on page 8. I tried my best to locate an issue to discuss the contents without any luck. I can tell you that the article was written at the Comdex show and the author did interview the Atari press people. Please make an effort to read this positive news about Atari!

## COMDEX PICTURES

John Nagy worked extensive overtime this week producing excellent VIDI-ST pictures from the Comdex show. Currently there are 13 pictures available with more on the way. These pictures are available on GENie and the Z\*Net BBS. CompuServe will be updated shortly. Included in the releases are pictures of the MegaSTe, Atari Booth, Nathan Potechin, Bob Brodie and the Portfolio to name a few.

## THANKS

We greatly appreciate the reception and comments passed our way during Comdex week. We are pleased that you enjoyed the coverage and took the

time to tell us how you feel. I have passed along your comments to John Nagy and Dr. Paul Keith, (John's Assistant and Z\*Net Correspondent) the people behind the reports. Thanks again and enjoy this wrap-up issue of the events at Fall Comdex 90.

Z\*NET ONLINE SPECIAL REPORT  
ATARI AT FALL COMDEX 1990

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by John Nagy  
for Z\*NET NEWS SERVICE

Twice a year, the INTERFACE GROUP throws the biggest computer show the USA ever sees. It is COMDEX, with the Fall show in Las Vegas and the Spring show in Atlanta. This is where manufacturers meet the distributors and dealers who will buy the newest and best Computer products to put into their stores and catalogs. COMDEX is the computer re-sellers mecca. Atari was there, and so was Z\*NET NEWS SERVICE.

Through the last week, I released a series of on-site reports from the Las Vegas COMDEX show. In this show report, I'll summarize most of the information that was included in those live reports, and add a lot more of my final observations... as well as share my benchmarks for the new faster TT030 and the MEGA/STe.

SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 11:

It's setup time at the ever-more massive COMDEX computer exposition here in Las Vegas, Nevada. I visited the new show floor at the Sands Convention facility on Saturday afternoon to see the Atari exhibit being built. It is the largest floor area for a COMDEX that I have seen Atari have yet, with a mixed color scheme that clearly illustrated the differentiation of the Atari Personal/Home computer products from the Atari Business products. The Home area is accented by rainbow colored banners, rich in fluorescent oranges, while the Business area is a dignified Black and White.

Yes, the MEGA/STE is REAL, and I am writing this first report on one! The configuration is as predicted weeks ago in Z\*Net, identical construction to the TT, although in Grey rather than off-White. It is NOT in production yet, and may see distribution in very early 1991. (See the complete MEGA/STe review, following this story in this issue of Z\*NET.)

At least five Mega/STe units are set up in the Atari booth, along with more than seven TT/030 units. All the Mega/STe units here on display are hooked to the new Phillips 14" color monitors, the STEREO SOUND units, model SC1435. This is VERY nice, large screen unit that will replace the SC1224 monitors completely, and should retail at or just above the current color monitor price (around \$399 retail). It IS a step UP. The picture is every bit as good as the smaller screen units that preceded it, but comfortably larger. Full adjustments are offered (from the outside!) for picture size and centering. The internal sound is indeed stereo, but the amplifier and speakers are sadly no better than in the older mono units, leaving you to use external amps and speakers if you want the really clean, loud, distortion free sound that

the new output of the STe series is capable of.

The TT's are almost old news by now after a year has passed from the COMDEX introduction in 1989. But today they are running the new SC1434 color monitors that offer the new TT resolutions (\$450), and at least two are on the new Atari 19" monochrome monitors... VERRRRY impressive at under \$1,000 each. The latest TT configuration, running at 32 Mhz with the new TOS and GEM NEWDESK, is expected to base price at nearly \$3,000 (no monitor) for a four meg, fifty megabyte hard drive unit. Many developers are worried that this price is just too high to be competitive with the MAC II, available in similar (albeit slower) configurations for as little as \$2,500. While "street price" of the TT may well match or barely beat the Mac II, there must be some additional incentive for buyers to select against the MAC name and software base.

How fast is the TT030 now that it is officially 32 Mhz? Here is the QUICK INDEX report (see the explanation of the chart in the MEGA/STe review that follows this report). Figures shown are in percent of a "standard" ST with TOS 1.6 or 1.4, with 200% meaning double the speed of execution.

TT030 in Medium Resolution		
Function	Compared to "old" 16 Mhz TT	...to ST w/TOS 1.4
-----		
CPU Memory	303%	497%
CPU Register	410%	827%
CPU Divide	228%	1024%
CPU Shifts	228%	3534%
Graphics:		
TOS Text	108%	137%
TOS String	113%	157%
TOS Scroll	36%	67%
GEM Dialog	113%	195%

No, I have no idea why the TT is such a dog in scrolling. I know that QUICK ST and probably TURBO ST will do wonders for it. Other resolutions may fare much better... but I was happy to get ONE set of tests done in between the demos for the "real" customers.

The REALLY bad news is... the TT has NOT passed the FCC testing, and so it is NOT ready for US distribution. Yes, Atari had promised that the TT would be shipping right after COMDEX, and the failure to have it ready is a major blow to both morale and sales impact at this pivotal show. There are now NO promises on WHEN the TT030 can be shipped, despite the hopeful words of "real soon now".

Attending third-party Atari vendors are quite dismayed, both to find that the TT will not be available, and also to find that a new machine has been "sprung" on them, as the Mega/STe was NOT announced even to developers. There are wide concerns that the new machine may cause new software compatibility headaches. Atari assures them that it will NOT.

In keeping with the business flavor of COMDEX, the "Home" part of the Atari booth is small... featuring twin setups of 1040STe units on modems for CompuServe and GENie. It looks like the ONLY computer that Atari considers as a HOME unit now is the 1040STe. It may, in fact, become available to ALL dealers of any hardware or software if plans to place the 1040STe line with national distributors come to fruition.

Portfolios are all over the place, with hookups to a couple "alien" computers... a Mac SE and an IBM PS/2. It was a bit odd to see those computers in the Atari booth, but they are there to demonstrate connectivity with the palmtop Portfolio computer.

MONDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 12

The first day of Comdex is over, and I now sit wearily in the plush Caesar's Palace, ruminated over the day's events. It has been pretty good for Atari.

This Fall Comdex spans 2.2 MILLION square feet, and perhaps even MORE than 2.2 million SORE feet. The crowds are at least as large as ever, although there was much more traffic in the "established" convention halls than there was in the Sands Exposition and Convention Center (SECC), the brand new facility that helps make this Comdex 20% larger than any ever before. Unfortunately, Atari Corp is in the new SECC, and enjoyed less than throngs of people today. The traffic grew throughout the day, however, and most of us expect that the newness of the facility (this is the FIRST show of any kind in it, they just opened days ago) will wear off and that Comdex "regulars" will visit the hall later in the week.

The Atari exhibit looked even better today, with the last of the boxes and plastic carpet protectors put away, revealing further division between the "Home Computing" and "Business" areas of the booth. The Home area is about 20% of the booth, separated by a wide isle of burgundy carpet that exactly matches the regular isles. The visual impact is that Atari has two adjacent booths. I am told that at CES, the same concept will be used, with the proportions reversed.

Third party developers are again the focus of much of the booth. It was worthwhile coming to this COMDEX if only to see BOTH Dave Small AND Charles F. Johnson in sport coats and ties... that aren't just painted on t-shirts! They were showing the Mac emulator SPECTRE GCR (with version 3.0 software) and the Codehead products, respectively. And you should see SPECTRE flying on the TT030! Dave estimates that it runs about four times the speed of the GCR on a ST, clocking in right at about MAC II performance. Simultaneous demos on a TT and a Mega (old version) made me think a 4 factor is too low... it was FAST.

Also present: Gribnif with NEODESK 3, also showing a new CLI (still beta testing) that will run ANY .TOS program IN A GEM WINDOW, even LHARC!

Goldleaf, in the person of Lauren Sellars and John Fox, was showing the beta version of WordFlair 2 that will ship at the end of the year. It DOES include an integrated spell checker, and will be available as an upgrade to existing WordFlair users for only \$25, and will retail for \$149.95. They showed the new version using the new FSM GDOS (see more later in this report) and the result was stunning speed and versatility.

TALON is showing their IBM emulators... yes, emulatorS. Earl Miller says he now is the exclusive US distributor of PC-SPEED (now at only \$199!!) and AT-SPEED, and is co-distributor of both ATonce and Supercharger. Talk about cornering a good market!

Nathan Potechin has several workstations going showing Calamus and Dynacadd (in color!) on TT030 units. The new Phillips-built 19" monitor really looks good, and the Atari SLM605 laser printer produced some of the most flawless, fastest first copies I have seen. Forget about the

605 doing "only" 6 instead of 8 copies a minute (as the old SLM804 was rated). The first copy is FASTER... dunno why, but I don't care either. I just WANT one.

Nevin Shalit is here with Step-Ahead Software's TRACKER/ST database system.

Zephyr's Bill Yerger showed his STeFax machine, a combination scanner, printer, FAX, and copier for under \$1,000. It was impressive but slower than I hoped. Still, the versatility is remarkable. Bill also is about to offer SHERLOOK optical character recognition software for the ST. To be ready before Christmas, this German import will examine an IMG file of text (scan it in with any scanner), and in about a minute a page, deliver an ASCII file at 95% or better interpretation. Training the software for new fonts is reasonably painless but takes some time. Two versions will be available: Sherlook Jr. for \$189 will handle one font at a time; Sherlook Professional can interpret as many as seven fonts or sizes at one time for a mere \$789 (software only).

GENie had Don Rice, a systems programmer for the telecommunications service, on hand to show the Atari and other services offered online. I thank GENie for letting me use their live link to upload reports and pictures from the Comdex floor.

DREAMPARK DEVELOPMENT showed their Power Drive, a 1.44 meg floppy adaptor kit for the ST. Actually, it will allow putting up to 1.7 meg on a floppy using the included software. They hoped to show MAKPORT, a host adaptor device that makes MAC compatible SCSI for the use of any MAC device on the ST, either in ST or MAC emulation (GCR) mode. It will be available in weeks for near the \$100 mark.

HYPERLINK is a new database application generating language/interface/presentation system from JMG Software of Canada. Look for a release in December at \$50 off of the to-be-regular list price of \$149.50 (US Funds).

Artisan Software showed TRANSPORT, a long awaited way to move data between Atari ST computers and the Portfolio.

PAGESTREAM 2.0 was almost there, with SoftLogik promising that the ST version will be out in January. A beta version was offering fast, clean COLOR desktop publishing on a TT. The Amiga version is already done and out, and the Atari version 2 will replace the old version altogether as well as cost \$100 more, \$299. The improvements are legion in number.

MIGRAPH showed a new version of their TOUCH-UP software that offers additional features, and talked about an exciting new COLOR HAND SCANNER that they will bring first to the IBM and Amiga, then to the ST and TT in short order. To be out in the first quarter of '91, the color scanner needs at LEAST 2 meg of RAM, and REALLY shines with the 4 to 8 meg and high processing speed of the TT. Color DTP will be a reality on the Atari, with full graphics... for a mere \$800 or so. Trust me, these will SELL.

DR. T's software was there in the tiny MIDI area, showing on a pair of STACY laptop computers and playing through KORG keyboard and speakers to the passers-by.

Portfolio developers included XETORIX with their remarkable tiny hard drive, and IBP with PORTALOG, a mobile systems logging and analysis

system for monitoring of environmental control systems, like huge plants or office buildings.

Atari itself showed their new FSM GDOS ("Font Scaling Module"), to be released this winter, perhaps as a freeware update to the world, perhaps as a bundle with every new machine sold and some small fee to everyone else. This outline font technology updates the old and limited GDOS system to provide completely scalable and rotatable GDOS fonts. The outlines will be standard Ultrascript outlines, although from the IBM family of fonts rather than the Atari ST Ultrascript family. The added interchangability is probably worth the inconvenience to existing ST Ultrascript users. I played with the FMS system long enough to know that although it is even MORE complicated to install than the OLD GDOS, the power and versatility it adds to even simple printing programs is going to be worth every minute of effort.

On hand were Jack Tramiel, Sam Tramiel, Garry Tramiel, new General Manager Greg Pratt, and the Atari regulars including Bob Brodie, Art Morgan, Mel Stevens, Dan MacNamee, J.Patton, Don Thomas, Ceazar Dennis, Diana Goralczyk, and the new guy, Bill Rehbock. Greg Pratt is younger than I expected, and is very approachable. His enthusiasm for Atari shows in every word... and Greg is no newcomer to Atari, having been head of the Financial division for some years. It looks like he must have reason for optimism. I remain ready to believe.

Yes, Atari looks GOOD at this COMDEX, and has more square footage in the largest hall of the convention than any vendor except JVC. While one developer observed that they wished some of the COMDEX show dollars were going to support the developer and dealer network, in a very real way, they ARE. Here at COMDEX, in the largest computer resellers convention in the world, ATARI is making sure that NO ONE thinks that ATARI is a second class manufacturer. THAT MATTERS, friends. Across the board.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14

Tuesday brought larger numbers of visitors to the SANDS convention hall, the new facility that was comparatively lightly traveled on Monday. This brought crowds into the Atari booth, the largest and most central to the front doors in the entire hall.

Atari had some of the nicest literature on hand to date, fold-out color brochures for the "TT030 Graphics Workstation", the "Mega STe Business Computer", and the "1040STe Personal System". These were prepared by Marken and Associates, just recently re-signed with Atari after a less than dramatic stay with the advertising firm of Bob Thomas and Associates. Andy Marken was on hand throughout the show to help, talk, and learn more about what the users seem to want to know. That can only help in his efforts to promote Atari products.

While many of the passers-through were most intrigued by the rows of Portfolio palmtop computers, others were interested in what they perceived as a "more advanced Macintosh" environment. Still others knew of Atari "way back" and wanted to know what these new machines could do. We won't get a real report of the true effectiveness of the Atari presence at Comdex until (or IF) we hear what kind of numbers of dealer inquiries and distributor contracts are made.

Openly discussed by sales representatives and exhibitors was the possibility/likelihood of placing the 1040STe line into the major distributor channels, making them as easy for any dealer anywhere to buy

as any given software title. Pricing would become uniform for any quantity, and delivery would be out of Atari's hands. While this idea has a great deal going for it, Atari has concerns over possible abuses of the plan, such as distributors or dealers "unbundling" bundles of hardware and software for the purpose of selling it separately for more total income.

Bundles? Yes, there are at last approved Atari bundles for fourth-quarter distribution and promotion. There are still several to be approved, mostly including games and leisure software, but here are the ones that are a go so far. Remember, the prices here are SUGGESTED RETAIL.

- \* 520STFM HOME ENTERTAINMENT PACK: 520STFM, Missile Command, Star Raiders, Crack'd, Moon Patrol, NEOChrome, Joust. Retail: \$579.65
- \* 520STFM COMMUNICATIONS PACK: Computer, SX212 modem, STALKER and STENO telecommunications software. Retail: \$529.85
- \* 1040STE HOME PRINT SHOP BUNDLE: Computer, MIGRAPH HAND SCANNER, Touch-Up, Easy Draw 3.0. Retail: \$1,398.90
- \* 1040STE DELUXE PAINT PACK: Computer, ELECTRONIC ARTS DELUXE PAINT ANIMATOR. Retail: \$799.90
- \* DTP PACKAGE #1: Mega 2 computer, SM124 Mono Monitor, Megafile 30 hard drive, SLM605 Laser Printer, CALAMUS. Retail: \$2,199.00
- \* DTP PACKAGE #2: Mega 2 Computer, SM124 Mono Monitor, Megafile 30 hard drive, SLM605 Laser Printer, DESKSET II. Retail: \$2,099.00
- \* PORTFOLIO PC TRAVELER: Portfolio computer, File Manager ROM card, PC CARD DRIVE, and 128K Memory Card. Retail: under \$500.
- \* New SC1435 COLOR MONITOR, 14" screen, STEREO SOUND, swivel/tilt stand. Retail: \$399.00

If any of those prices sound a bit high, remember that Atari is now offering about a good markup in their retail prices, so dealers can either actually make some money OR offer great deals. Dealer costs tend to be about 66% of the retail, and street prices may be closer to 3/4 of the retail.

Late word is that the Portfolio may soon be in PRICE CLUB mass-marketing discount stores CHEAP. Dealers need not fear too much, since Price Club and other similar membership-oriented warehouse stores usually carry NO accessories, so dealers can pick up on the considerably more lucrative support market.

More promotion of the Atari Line came as a surprise to Bob Brodie, ISD's Nathan Potechin, and new Atari U.S. General Manager Greg Pratt on Tuesday night. The three attended the Beach Boys concert at Caesar's Palace as guests of the Beach Boys, longtime Atari MIDI users. During the opening act, the comedian Andy Bumatai mentioned that he was a computer fan and that the Atari TT "just blew me away". He wasn't joking at the time, either. Later, during the Beach Boys set, Bruce Johnston of the band stopped the music and said that he had a dedication to make, despite dedications being "old stuff these days". He proceeded to explain that the little computer at the corner of the stage had performed flawlessly for three years, "saving their behinds" over and

over. He finished by saying, "Atari, this one's for you", and the bad went into "Don't Worry Baby". The Atari table was totally surprised, and Greg asked Bob how he pulled that one off. Bob, as surprised as any of them, recovered enough to say "it was just a phone call..." Betcha Greg remembers Bob at Christmas...

#### WRAPUP

This is perhaps the longest review of a show I have ever assembled... and perhaps it should be. Although I left before the Friday close of the show, I know that I could have walked non-stop all week and NOT have seen MOST of the show. I did see the COMMODORE exhibit, a ways back in the same hall as Atari. It was perhaps 25% the size of Atari's area, but was filled with very dramatic video presentations on the Amiga machines. One, a real-time color video digitizer, was so good that it made our VIDI-ST pictures look like kids drawings. Of course, it was maybe 10 times the price... or more. But the crowds weren't there. Atari had lots more general interest. Much of it for the Portfolio.

There was LOTS of Atari to see and discuss at this COMDEX, although much of the discussion was less than a treat to participate in. The disappointments from Atari just keep coming. But the presence of Atari simply won't go away, either. Atari proves over and over that there is every reason to expect that the company can indeed produce the right machine at the right price. This time it is the Mega/STe. (My personal opinion of the TT030 is that it is too much money for what it delivers.)

The amount of money and effort that goes into a dramatic showing of best intent, as Atari has shown and spent at this COMDEX, once again has pulled many users and developers (and writers!) back from the brink of jumping ship. We hope that it will do the same for dealers and distributors of Atari hardware in the USA. That's what COMDEX is for.

#### COMDEX IMPRESSIONS

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by Terry May

#### Z\*NET SPECIAL REPORT

John Nagy has been providing excellent coverage of Comdex, detailing all of the latest wares from Atari. Rather than simply repeating what John has already said, and giving you a list of all the new goodies, I'll simply give you my impressions of Atari's presence at Comdex and what the future looks like (to me, anyway).

Obviously, excitement abounds at all the great new hardware Atari showed. The TT is relatively 'old news,' since it was shown at last year's Comdex. The 32 Mhz and new desktop are important new additions, however. It would've been nice to get a 1.4 meg drive and a new case, but hey, that's the breaks. I think the TT we saw is likely to be awfully close to the TT we'll someday be able to buy.

The Mega STe was probably the hit of the show, since it was somewhat of a surprise, and it's definitely something a great many users have been screaming for. I'm sure many people will be disappointed that it comes in the TT "wedding cake box," but I don't blame Atari for doing that.



As long as they're going to stick with that case for the TT, they may as well keep their manufacturing costs down by using the same case for the Mega STe. Also, it's expected this will speed up FCC approval.

Atari was smart to give the Mega STe 16 Mhz speed and the new TT desktop. It also comes with a new control panel that people are going to love. One of the neat things about the control panel is controls for the stereo base, treble and balance! The Mega STe is obviously not just a simple 1040STe with a separate keyboard (albeit still mushy - why can't Atari make a keyboard with a tactile response?). It has its own identity.

Everyone's been raving about the new stereo monitor, and for good reason. It has a larger screen without sacrificing quality. The only thing that puzzles me is the new "green mode" switch. I was unable to find anyone that knew of any use for that. I could see if it allowed you to run monochrome software, or if it improved medium rez text, but it does neither. If it costs \$10 to build that in, it's \$10 wasted, in my opinion. Still, all in all, the new monitor is an excellent replacement for the SC1224.

The new laser printer is also very exciting. A much smaller size, with only slightly slower output (though many swear it's faster than the SLM804 -- at least on the first page), and perhaps most important -- it's more affordable. This could be a big seller.

Atari seems to be pushing the Portfolio more than anything, and the public seemed to be responding, as the many on display were being kept very busy. They even had one hooked up to a Mac and had one of the RAM card drives hooked up to an IBM. I also personally saw several people inquire how and where they could purchase one.

Alright, so I did kind of do a list. But it's worth hearing about more than once! Now about those impressions.

Atari's display was very spacious, although a lot of it was unused. Of course, that unused space allowed room to breathe that wasn't available at past shows. It was very well laid out and very professional looking.

If Comdex is about showing off, Atari certainly did that. It's also always a time for optimism, and it's apparent they have inspired quite a bit of optimism, at least as far as many Atarians are concerned.

I wish I could share that optimism, but I guess Atari has made me a skeptic. As always, I see a lot of great new hardware, but at the same time (and at the same show), I hear grumblings that dealers cannot get hardware for the Christmas season and developers moving on to other platforms. I also see that the "promise" of the release of the TT at Comdex was broken.

Two words keep popping in my head when I think of Atari: "Vaporware" and "Marketing." They seem to have a plenty of the former, but not a lot of the latter. To be fair, 1990 brought us the Stacy (sort of) and the 1040STe. But, of course, we're the only ones who know about them. Atari says they don't advertise because they sell all they can make. So I guess the problem is their production capacity is too low.

Enough of the commentary. I told you I'd give you my impressions that Comdex left me with, and I did. Simply put, I was very impressed with the new hardware, but just as skeptical as always. Sorry to end on a

sour note, but I think with all the unbridled optimism being bandied about, it's important to keep things in perspective. Regardless of what Atari's engineering team comes up with, until they learn how to get the stuff to the dealers and advertise, the Atari market will continue to dwindle. Here's hoping that 1991 will be the year Atari shuts all of us skeptics up!

#### THE NEW ATARI MEGA/STE - A CLOSEUP LOOK

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by John Nagy  
for Z\*NET NEWS SERVICE

Z\*NET SPECIAL REPORT

Atari's major new product announcement for COMDEX was the totally redesigned MEGA STe. To be available after the first of the year, it is identical in appearance to the TT030 but in grey rather than off-white. Base configuration is not completely settled, but may be 2 meg RAM, 40 meg internal hard drive, TOS 2.2 or higher with the Atari NewDesk enhanced GEM and Extensible Control Panel. The Mega STe also has a 16 Mhz 68000 CPU, which is switchable (with and without static RAM cache, or vanilla 8 Mhz for compatibility with problem software). Price for the base unit will be "under \$1200" retail, making the Mega/STe with mono monitor retail for less than a similarly outfitted Mac Classic... and twice as fast. It is possible that street price for a monitor-less Mega/STe will be just under \$1,000.

In my discussion of the new machine, keep in mind that I am trying to respond to as many issues as possible... trivial and important. The questions I fielded at the GENie RTC last Wednesday night pointed out the level of detail that the public wants... and wants NOW.

The Mega/STe is, above all else, an STe. By this I mean that unless stated differently in this discussion, you may assume that any feature on the new Mega is the same as on the 1040STe. That includes, NO new TT resolutions, NO new colors or video outputs, etc. The Mega/STe has the STe standard 4096 color palette with the same mono high res, four-color medium res, and 16 color low resolution modes with hardware scrolling. Also like the STe, GENLOCK is available without modification, but requires JRI's external hardware. A 68881 math coprocessor socket is also offered. The internal floppy is 720K, and the ones in the sample machines refused to deal with extended format disks, although I am assured that this will not remain the case.

According to the literature offered at Comdex, the Mega/STE DOES OFFER A BLITTER, unlike the 1040STe.

Ports include the full complement of the 1040STe line MINUS the analog joystick ports. This was a surprise considering that they were just added to the STe. This may signal the ultimate demise of the ports in any commercial software. Additional ports are: LAN port, Appletalk compatible, same as the TT; TWO modem ports in the new smaller connector configuration that is becoming standard (although the second port shares internal hardware with the LAN port that may make simultaneous use with the LAN impractical); VME BUS CARD PORT, same as the TT and accessible from the rear of the machine (can be anything but most units on the COMDEX floor featured a "third RS232" port card). The Mega/STe does NOT

offer the "real SCSI" port that the TT has, and the DMA port is now called "ACSI" as it is on the TT.

All other ports are the same as the STe, right down to and including an RF output jack to run a TV or VCR, and composite video available on the monitor line just like the older ST standard. Midi is unchanged, and the cart port is in the same location. However, the cart port may be electrically different by some degree: VIDI-ST will NOT operate on the Mega/STe OR the TT regardless of CPU speed settings (SPECTRUM pictures show fine at 8 Mhz). This can't yet be seen as a major concern, since Vidi-ST does some pretty unorthodox timing games in order to digitize the video, and all other cartridges tested to date (including SPECTRE, MIGRAPH SCANNER, etc) seem to operate flawlessly. (Vidi-ST works just fine on the 1040STe.)

The power switch for the Mega/STe is placed in a very awkward place, in the center of the back panel right below where you are certain to place your monitor. One observer stated that the only worse position would be UNDERNEATH the machine. Fortunately, the RESET button is within easy reach, on the left side of the machine, just behind the LAN, MIDI, and CART ports.

While some observers find the design of the TT and now Mega/STe case to be hideous, I find it quite acceptable. The wider base takes more desk area, but the internal hard drive earns its footprint. A minor problem will be the fact that the existing line of Atari hard drives share the "old" Mega look, which just does NOT integrate at all with the new case. You can't stack it and have it look like anything but... a pile. While you could set your monitor to the side on top of the older style equipment, the new case allows use of a slick new custom monitor base that fits and locks into place on top of the TT/Mega STe. Of course, if you have two monitors, your arrangement "problem", such as it is, is resolved.

The Mega/STe keyboard is the same as the TT030 as well, featuring a better feel than the "old" Mega keyboard principally due more to a better, isolated keytop style than to different keyswitches. The function keys are now much more distinguishable due to better spacing, clear markings, and finger stops at the left edge of each button. The mouse port is on the right edge of the keyboard, and the keyboard cord exits to the right. This is odd since the cable must then cross over in front of the computer to enter its left side. It makes the "keyboard docking" feature (where the keyboard sets in a relief on the front of the CPU unit) less usable, as you almost have to stand up to route the cord in a manner that allows the dock. But this is, frankly, no big deal either.

The two best features of the new Mega/STe are the 16Mhz speed and the new TOS/Extensible Control Panel. Speed is switchable via the new control panel to 8 Mhz or 16 Mhz with or without the static RAM cache. Performance figures are very good, as fast or barely faster than an ST with any 16 Mhz accelerator, and are reported via Quick Index numbers at the end of this article. The new desktop is subtle but addictive. User configurable hot keys for most every function, plus applications installed on function keys, plus new icons, plus live desk icons for programs, plus selectable window, border, and desktop colors and patterns... you get the idea. The NewDesk will probably not cut into sales of existing desktop alternatives, however, as the scope of the features is far below that of Hotwire, NeoDesk, etc. But when running without one of these, the new features are truly appreciated. The

Mega/STe I used extensively during Comdex did show some peculiar crashes and bugs, and I am assured that TOS 2.2 will be revised before release. By the way, Atari calls this TOS 2.02 internally, and in fact, TOS 1.4 is 1.04 to the folks inside. The zero gets dropped due to the way the number is stored in the ROM.

Atari's new "Extensible Control Panel" offers hooks for a variety of environmental additives, including the normal CP functions plus GDOS control, mouse acceleration, and more things than have yet been imagined. The look and feel of the new panel is all new, and it includes graphic accents that make it more fun to use without being too cute. The smiling face with headphones that turns one way or the other depending on the stereo sound balance setting is one example. Control Panel Extensions are loaded via a "CPX" configuration, sort of like a cross between the way desk accessories and GDOS fonts are loaded.

#### MEGA/STe QUICK INDEX NUMBERS:

Please keep in mind while looking at these comparisons that Quick Index, a benchmarking program by Darek Mihocka, merely provides timing measures of the repeated execution of several common procedures. It was designed for use on the ST series of machines, and makes certain reasonable assumptions about what is happening in the CPU and operating system. It is likely that these assumptions and measures have application to new hardware and firmware in new Atari computers, but it is always possible that some measures might be systematically distorted by some new factor that was not anticipated by Darek. Additionally, the TOS in the Mega/STe is NOT the final production version. Therefore, use this table of measurements as nothing more than it is presented for: to give an initial, general, relative indication of how fast a given function might be executed on the new Mega/STe compared to a standard machine and to other accelerated machines. Figures shown are in percent of a "standard" ST with TOS 1.6 or 1.4, with 200% meaning double the speed of execution. Graphics numbers are presented but are not directly comparable as the Mega/STe TOS is not yet finalized, and matters of Blitter and Mono/Color variables further confuse the comparison.

Function	Mega STe, Med Resolution			Stacy	Mega4
	8 Mhz	16 Mhz	16 w/Cache	ICD ADSPEED	T16
CPU Memory	100%	100%	165%	164%	135%
CPU Register	100%	100%	204%	204%	204%
CPU Divide	100%	183%	204%	203%	203%
CPU Shifts	100%	179%	208%	207%	207%
Graphics:					
TOS Text	93%	99%	158%	161%	155%
TOS String	95%	100%	157%	158%	145%
TOS Scroll	78%	78%	88%	114%	140%
GEM Dialog	76%	79%	124%	116%	189%

#### CONCLUSIONS:

Overall, I found the Mega/STe to be a treat to use: fast, nicely featured, and probably priced very well. It is a much more attractive package for a serious user than the older MEGA or the 1040 style machines, and will be actually much cheaper than adding an accelerator and hard drive to an STe. Look for this machine to be the hottest mover in the Atari computer line.

I understand that there was considerable political debate in Atari about showing the Mega/STe at Comdex. It seems that there are many unsold MEGA 1 units in Germany that the Atari division there fears will not move now that the world has seen what is to come next. These cannot be sold in the USA since they are not 110 volt or FCC approved. Germany may not see the Mega/STe until AFTER the USA is already shipping them. It's about time we had the advantage.

## CHICAGO ATARIFEST '90 REPORT

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by D.A. Brumleve

### SHOW REPORT

After having just put on a successful "SwapFest" last April, the Lake County Atari Computer Enthusiasts (LCACE) presented the equally-successful Chicago AtariFest '90 on Sunday, November 11. The site for this show was a two-story American Legion Hall in the suburb of Gurnee. Each story held a separate showfloor; most of the commercial vendor booths were on the first level, while user groups offered a variety of used wares and public domain disks for sale and swap on the second level.

Users came from around the Chicago area and beyond. Greater Chicago ACE, Local Area Users' Group (Chicago), LCACE, Milwaukee Area Users' Group, MilAtari Ltd. (Milwaukee), Rockford Atari Computer Club, Suburban Atari Chicago Atarians, STar Users Group (Scott AFB, IL), and The Users' Group (suburban Chicago) all had booths at the show to solicit members, promote user education, and sell equipment and software. Other groups provided caravans of members to attend the event; EAUG brought a VW vanload all the way from Alton IL (near St. Louis)! Visitors of special note included the elusive Ralph Turner, writer of self-help books for the Atari ST user and a column in ST Informer.

Users came expecting bargains, and they were not disappointed. The swap tables, of course, offered numerous items at incredibly low prices, the kind of amazing sale in which you buy even though you don't need it. Commercial vendors had special offers, too.

WizWorks! was selling MUG SHOT!, Dr. Bob's MVG (the all new version 2.0) and IMAGE CAT at discounted prices. Dr. Bob had just released his scanner modules for MVG and these were offered at Chicago for the first time anywhere; the module supporting the MiGraph hand-scanner is \$19.95 and the one supporting the Geniscan/ST scanner is \$14.95. Quite a few eager folks picked up the Golden Image mouse which WizWorks! was selling for a mere \$40. Some clip art disks and of course MUG SHOT! mugs were on their table, too.

John Eidsvoog of CodeHead, assisted by his wife Julie, were demonstrating the CodeHead's many fine utility offerings. Always on the lookout for something new, I discovered at their booth size XXL t-shirts! Vendors, take note! There's a big need for oversize shirts among Atari users. CodeHead's display included a TT, and those who came early had a chance to see it running; it gave up the ghost partway

through the day. Both John's and Julie's parents dropped by during the show, and theirs was not the only family affair.

Carl Stanford and Henry Murphy of M-S Designs brought along Henry's wife, son, and daughter to help man/woman/child the booth. M-S Designs offers a variety of fonts for both Calamus and PageStream (both versions on the same disk, a boon to users who own both DTP programs).

I brought two of my children, too, in the hope that they would keep my booth computer busy, but I needn't have. They had plenty of help from Chet Walter's daughter and the Murphy children. My table offered Kidpublisher Professional, Kidpainter, Super Kidgrid, and a special price of \$20 for Telegram.

Unicorn Publications introduced their AIM t-shirt, which is adorned with the same multi-colored ship as appears on the November issue. (The shirts are available from Unicorn Publications for \$10 + \$2 for shipping.) They also sold copies of the magazine, their disks of the month, and The Scrolls of Mount Anaias. They picked up two new AIM groups at the show and had inquiries from others.

Chuck Steinman of DataQue sold products for the 8-bit user, and there were plenty of interested folks at the show. His booth offered Turbo-816, Software for Turbo-816, and PD software. T-816 has been on the market for two years, yet Chuck reports that there was still a great deal of interest. "I also was distributing info on the Transkey PC-Atari keyboard adapter, which was very popular with attendees." He hosted a seminar which was well attended. "That is an indication that there are quite a few which are not ready to abandon their 8-bit yet." Reeve Software also had a booth promoting its products for the 8-bit.

Assistant Sysop of the ST RT Jeff Williams manned a booth for GENie. He distributed black disks (to match my STacy, I guess!) with GENie's new Aladdin ST terminal program. While demonstrating the program, he also had numerous opportunities to explain GENie's Star\*Services plan. Since October, users have paid a basic rate of \$4.95/month, which includes many GENie services. Services not included in the plan now cost \$6/hour even at 2400 baud.

CompuServe was also represented at the show. Sysop Bob Retelle was assisted at the booth by Jim Ness, author of a CIS navigation program, QuickCIS. They gave away a number of CIS starter memberships with \$15 credit. "I have not personally been to a recent Atari show, and was very pleasantly surprised by the crowd, and the attitudes. The Atari world is very much alive and kicking. We had a good time," Jim reports.

Craig S. Thom and Cliff Terry represented ICD. "For the first time [at a show] someone could actually walk up and buy an AdSpeed ST," Craig says. ICD also had all three host adaptors, Cleanup ST, Personal Pascal for the ST, and t-shirts for sale. The entire 8-bit line was available at their booth: Printer Connections, P:R:Connections, Multi I/Os, Action!, MAC/65, BASIC. Attracting attention on their table was a Mega cut open to reveal the AdSpeed ST and internal hard drive. Suggested retail price for AdSpeed ST is \$299.95. ICD had not attended the April show even though Rockford, where they are located, is only a few hours drive. What did Craig think of this show? "ICD was pleasantly surprised by the show. Very worthwhile."

The branch of Atari (Lombard IL) which specializes in Lynx support brought along some un-released games to tantalize the game players at the

show. A representative of A.P.E. Newsletter solicited subscriptions for this brand-new Lynx quarterly.

Kelly Webb of SKWare One showed his new Seurat 2.0, a graphics design program that has come a mighty long way since publication of the original version in SStart.

Other vendors included several Chicago-area dealers. Turnout is estimated at approximately that of the previous MidWest Atari SwapFest, between 600 and 1000 visitors. Vendors seemed very satisfied, and certainly the crowd did as well. "We will return!" says Chet Walters. "We liked the folks (all very enthusiastic and friendly folks) and we also liked the location. Wonderful time and great show!" All in all, it was indeed a very good show, with plenty to interest all who came. LCACE has struck again!

Vendors:

A.P.E. Newsletter  
2104 Kostner / Chicago, IL 60126 / 312 227 2353

CodeHead Software  
P.O. Box 74090 / Los Angeles, CA 90004 / 213 386 5735

CompuServe  
5000 Arlington Center Blvd. / Columbus, OH 43220

D.A. Brumleve  
P.O. Box 4195 / Urbana, IL 61801-8820 / 217 337 1937

DataQue Software  
P.O. Box 134 / Ontario, OH 44862 / 419 529 2478

GEnie  
401 N. Washington / Rockville, MD 20850 / 800 638 9636 ext. 21

ICD  
1220 Rock St. / Rockford, IL 61101 / 815 968 2228

M-S Designs  
611 West Illinois St. / Urbana, IL 217 384 8469

Reeve Software  
29 Old Farm Lane / Warrenville, IL 60555 / 708 393 2317

SKWare One  
P.O. Box 277 / Bunker Hill, IL 62014 / 618 585 4535

Unicorn Publications  
3487 Braeburn Circle / Ann Arbor, MI 48108 / 313 973 8825

WizWorks!  
P.O. Box 45 / Girard, OH 44202 / 216 539 5623

Branch Always Software  
14150 N.E. 20th St., Unit 302  
Bellevue, WA 98007 USA

November 9, 1990

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\* new credit card order line \*\* Quick ST II Challenge in full swing \*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

Seattle's largest Atari ST dealer, Cave Creek Computers, is now making it even easier to order Quick ST 2.2 or Quick Tools. Simply call the order line during normal business hours, and have your name, address, and Master Card or VISA card number ready.

Order line: (206)-783-0933, Monday to Saturday 10am to 6pm.

Prices:

Quick ST 2.2: \$18.95 + shipping (\$1 saving)  
Quick Tools: \$27.95 + shipping (\$2 saving)  
Quick Tools and Quick ST 2.2: \$39.95 + shipping (\$10 saving)

Shipping is \$3 and up, depending on the method of shipping (UPS, first class mail, etc). These prices are slightly lower than our regular list prices.

If you don't have a Master Card or VISA card, you can still order our products by check or money order at the following prices:

Quick ST 2.2: \$19.95 + \$3 shipping  
Quick Tools: \$29.95 + \$3 shipping  
Quick Tools and Quick ST 2.2: \$39.95 + \$3 shipping (\$10 saving)

The Quick ST II Demo Disk is now also shipping. It is ABSOLUTELY FREE! If you are not aware of our free offer, download the Quick ST II Challenge text file from Compuserve or GENie and read our offer. If you don't have access to these services, then let us save you the trouble..

The Quick ST II Challenge is this: we are so sure that you will not be able to live without the speed that Quick ST 2.2 will add to your ST, that we will send you a FREE DEMO DISK of Quick ST 2.2 just for the asking. Write your name and address and a description of your ST system down on a piece of paper or post card, and mail it to us at the above address. Take the Challenge! You even get to keep the disk, whether or not you buy.

Darek Mihocka - President, Branch Always Software

JUST ANOTHER WAR IN SPACE  
November 1, 1990

\* PRESS RELEASE \*

Product Marketing Seattle is pleased to announce an exciting new ATaRi ST product by Azeroth Publishing - Just Another War in Space.



Just Another War in Space is a game of interplanetary tactics and strategy for the Atari ST. You assume the role of spacecraft captain for either the Empire or the Federation. Control your spacecraft from the captain's computer console, showing 3-D sensor data and a variety of displays containing controls and detailed status information for weapons, maneuver, damage controls, force field, electronic warfare, tractor beams, settings for your ship's computer, and much more.

The game accurately models real-time spaceflight mechanics, and packs a wealth of on-board systems detail into its 500 KByte simulation program. The mouse and menu-driven interface and step-by-step tutorial get you into the action right away. The game provides many user options, including the design of spacecraft from modular components and variable computer-opponent strength and expertise.

Seven scenarios of increasing complexity give you the chance to command everything from individual spacecraft to task forces and fleets of starships. Victory goes to the commander with the ability to make time-critical decisions that efficiently use the resources available. The opposing spacecraft are controlled by sophisticated artificial intelligence, making even a single enemy spacecraft a deadly opponent. Includes a 138 page reference manual, sector map, and spacecraft identification guide. \$49.95, plus shipping, handling and sales tax (if applicable). Requires 1 megabyte RAM, color monitor, and double-sided floppy-disk drive. Available from:

Azeroth Publishing  
3020 Issaquah-Pine Lake Road  
Suite 341  
Issaquah, WA 98027  
(206) 392-9941

Sales: (800) 594-4798 in the US, (206) 868-2332 in Canada.

Z\*NET NEWSWIRE

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Z\*NET NEWS SERVICE (ZNS)

#### ATARI THIRD QUARTER REPORT

ATARI CORP. 3RD QTR OPER LOSS(DJ)	7C A SHR VS. NET LOSS 9C
QUAR SEPT. 30 1990	1989

SALES	\$89,146,000	\$81,444,000
INCOME	(3,855,000)	(5,395,000)
EXTRD CRED A	6,858,000	----
NET INCOME	3,003,000	(5,395,000)

#### SHR ERNS:

INCOME	(.07)	(.09)
NET INCOME	.05	(.09)

#### 9 MONTHS:

SALES	259,588,000	252,960,000
INCOME	(782,000)	(1,780,000)

EXTRD CRED	A	6,858,000	----
NET INCOME		6,076,000	(1,780,000)

SHR EARN:			
INCOME		(.01)	(.03)
NET INCOME		.11	(.03)

A. GAIN FRROM REPURCHASE OF DEBENTURES.  
 FIGURES IN PARENTHESES ARE LOSSES.

#### COMDEX OPENS

Fall Comdex 90 opened and closed this week as 1850 corporations provided a look at their latest offerings. The booths combined cover 2.2 million square feet in seven convention centers and aisles cover 22 1/2 miles. This is the largest annual trade show in the United States. The show is sponsored by The Interface Group and well over 120,000 people attended the week long affair. The show began with a keynote speech by Bill Gates, CEO of Microsoft Corp. on Monday morning and throughout the week there were 48 conference sessions. The price tag just to enter the exhibit area was \$75.00 and for \$300.00 conferences and exhibits.

#### MEDIAGENIC POSTS LOSS

Mediagenic has posted a \$4.3 million net loss for the second quarter ended September 30. A year ago Mediagenic reported a net loss of \$1.9 million. Revenues during the period fell 48 percent to \$8.7 million from \$16.8 million a year ago.

#### HAYES DROPS PRICES

Hayes has reduced prices by up to 67 percent on its JT Fax products. JT Fax 9600B with Smartmodem 2400 Module and Smartcom EZ will drop from \$695 to \$499; the JT Fax 4800B is reduced from \$295 to \$199; the JT Fax 4800 Portable comes down from \$495 to \$199, and the JT Fax 4800P reduces from \$595 to \$199. Hayes also said it also will offer an easy upgrade path for current users of its Ultra 96 modem requiring the new CCITT V.32bis standard.

#### Z\*NET CANADA

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by Terry Schreiber

#### WHERE'S THE TT'S

In talking with Darek Mihocka tonight I receive a rather interesting bit of information regarding the Atari TT's. One would naturally assume that Atari had supplied developers with units before releasing units for public sale but not the case. Darek explained that Atari was releasing TT's to developers in order of their Zip Codes. I really find that hard to swallow, surely they should have gone out on a first come first serve basis or at least some sort of list. Darek also planned to be in the Sunnyvale area next week and was hoping at that time to pick one up - his request was met with "We don't distribute that way". This coming

from a company that bought up a retail chain to go into competition with their own dealers. Developers are the first people who should be receiving your units before they go on sale to the public or dealers. Do you expect John Q. Customer to purchase his machine when he hears that the people doing software support for his machine don't have one. Developers should have machines a minimum of three months before they are released for public sale.

In all fairness to Atari we do realize that there is a shortage of machines available at this time, perhaps a second look will be made next time before machines are released not only on this continent as to supporting the developers with machines before selling to the end users.

#### DOS WARS

Vancouver B.C. has become the buyers haven for clones. Price wars are in full flare as dealers fight for a piece of the market share. Looking for a DOS machine? Perhaps a long distance call and shipping could save you quite a bit of cash - but remember your local dealer can also supply you with support and service. These might far out-weigh any price savings.

#### CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

Yes it's that time of year again, just six weeks left. We all know what we want and now is the time for dropping those subtle hints. The average computer user would like to see something for their system. The problem with this is most people purchasing gifts for you do not even give a second thought to getting you that software program or printer stand because they don't know exactly what you want.

If you are a regular shopper to a computer store, more than likely you are on their customer database with a complete list of hardware and software that you have purchased from them. There are three ways you can get lucky here.

- 1) You could drop the hint as to which store to go to to shop. (a little extreme at times but it does work once in a while)
- 2) Have a sales person from that store call and recommend something you want.
- 3) The salesperson you normally deal with will take it upon themselves to contact your spouse and discuss a suitable gift. (This may sound far fetched but I have done just this in the past with great results)

There is one more alternative I have failed to mention because I think it is a little under-handed but here goes. Take your spouse shopping and just happen to kill two hours at the computer store on a Saturday afternoon. Make sure that you introduce the salesperson to them and repeat their name a few times during the conversation. When the salesperson asks for a close, reply with " Well I just looking right now but maybe for Christmas". You can now bet your spouse's ears perked up with that, two hours and we are finally leaving - now what was it we even came here for - oh yes a modem. There it is hook, line and sinker.

One more thing I should add before closing is that software for children is another item not even considered as gifts at Christmas. Why? If you enjoy receiving a new program don't you think they would?

A quick word of warning - DO NOT leave this article around for the spouse to find. A two hour stint could prove hazardous to your health.

#### PUBLIC DOMAIN UPDATE

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by Keith MacNutt

#### DICTION V.A by Dan Panke

Diction is a program with a difference, it may be a spell checker but it doesn't come with a dictionary file. The author decided to allow the user to create their own by entering words that are used in their respective fields. The dictionary that is used by a doctor is not the same as a lawyer or the home hobbyist that needs to check his article on computers. In letting the user choose the words that are entered into the dictionary, the author allows for a wide range of occupations to customize a spell checker to fit their needs instead of getting a pre-packaged dictionary that they will have to add to anyway.

#### LOADING

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Diction works in medium or high rez and loads dictiona.ry as it's main spelling file. When first run there is no dictionary file so the program will ask if you wish to create one, this file should remain in the same path as it is easier to find at run time.

#### USING THE PROGRAM

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Once you have Diction loaded with the appropriate speller file you are asked to insert your text file, which calls for a disk swap or if you have it installed on a hard drive, involves picking the path to the correct file. Files must not exceed 3500 lines (60k) or be in anything but ascii format.

#### OPTIONS

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Diction allows you very simple editing and entry control. Once Diction finds a word that is not in the dictionary file it asks if you want to left mouse click to continue or right click to add the word to the speller. If you accidentally add a word to the dictionary you cannot delete the word from within Diction, you must edit the dictiona.ry file or the file you have assigned for your words with a text editor. Don't delete the word entirely, but instead change the spelling or enter a different word in its place.

Diction counts the number of words for each letter in the alphabet, and deleting a word will throw the count out. At present, only 32,768 words can be saved per dictionary file.

As your document is being spell checked the program will display the amount of words in your Diction file, the percentage of file checked and the number of words checked.

#### POSITIVES

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In the three years that I have used the ST, I've found very few stand alone spell checkers. I find Diction to be a very thorough and easy to use program with the user in control of what words should be in a spell checker, a great Idea. Most available checkers have at least 70,000 words and the user has to buy a word processor to get a decent one.

#### NEGATIVES

=====

The only things I find lacking in Diction is the ability to edit out a word in the dictionary file and you must enter even the smallest words if you want a complete spell checker. One way to get around this last problem is to skip the simple words and enter only those that you find you spell incorrectly.

Over all this is an easy to use package and the programmer has done an excellent job in writing a utility that everyone could use at one time or another, so if you find it meets your needs and you use it please send a contribution to the programmer, and maybe he'll spend the time to fix or improve an exceptional program.

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